

Meruzhan Artsruni

(d. c. 371/380/381)

BRIEFING

Meruzhan Artsruni (Armenian: Մերուժան Արծրունի *Meružan Arcruni*, also spelled *Merujan*, *Ardzruni*, *Artzruni*, *Artsrouni*; died 371 or 380/1) was a 4th-century *nakhharar* (Armenian feudal lord) from the Artsruni family.

BIOGRAPHY

When the Persian king Shapur II invaded Armenia in the 360s, Meruzhan, his brother-in-law Vahan Mamikonian, and several other Armenian lords renounced Christianity for Zoroastrianism and defected to Persia. Meruzhan helped Shapur's army capture Tigranocerta and raid the districts of Arzanene, Ingilene, Mzur in Upper Armenia, Sophene and Acilisene, where they captured Ani-Kamakh and desecrated the graves of the Armenian Arsacid kings. The Armenian king Arshak II fled west to Asia Minor, while *sparapet* (generalissimo) Vasak Mamikonian was left to defend the central province of Ayrarat alone. Arsaces and Vasak would later be captured by Shapur by deception; Vasak was put to death and Arsaces committed suicide or was executed in Anhush Berd.

Battle of Bagavan

The Battle of Bagavan (also spelled Bagawan), Battle of Dzirav (Armenian: Զիրավի ճակատամարտ, romanized: Dziravi chakatamart) or the Battle of Vagabanta was fought in 371 near the settlement of Bagavan, in the district of Bagrevand in Greater Armenia, between a joint Roman-Armenian force and a Sassanid army, with the Romans and Armenians emerging victorious. It is recorded by the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus, as well as the Armenian historian Faustus of Byzantium.

The Armenian historian Movses Khorenatsi and several later Armenian historians following him place the battle in a field called Dzirav, and so the battle is called the Battle of Dzirav in some Armenian sources. In the view of historians Hakob Manandian and Nina Garsoïan, this is an error by Khorenatsi or a conflation of the Battle of Bagavan with the battle at Gandzak described in the next chapter of Faustus's history.

Background

In the aftermath of the Perso-Roman peace treaty of 363, whereby Rome had pledged not to intervene in Armenian affairs, Armenia was left at the mercy of the Sassanid king Shapur II, who in 367/368 imprisoned the Armenian king Arshak II and strove to consolidate Persian rule in the country. In 369, the Roman emperor Valens allowed Pap, son of Arshak II, to return to Armenia accompanied by the general Terentius. However, Pap was soon driven out of Armenia by Shapur's armies and forced to hide in Lazica. While Pap was in hiding, Shapur contacted him and persuaded him to change his allegiance to Persia, but this attempted rapprochement was aborted when Valens's general Arintheus arrived and restored Pap to the Armenian throne a second time.

Shapur was enraged by this move, but did not declare the peace with Rome void until the winter of 370. Shapur amassed an army, which, according to Faustus, included the forces of his ally King Urnayr of Albania, and invaded Armenia in the spring of 371. Valens sent a large army to Armenia under the command of generals Traianus and Vadamarius, but with orders to engage only in defensive actions, hoping to maintain the peace with Persia. The Armenians also assembled their army under the command of sparapet (general-in-chief) Mushegh Mamikonian and convened with the Romans near the settlement of Bagavan, in the district of Bagrevand, at the foot of Mount Npat, near the source of the Arsianias River. Faustus gives the number of the Armenian army as 90,000.

Battle

The combined Armenian-Roman army met the invading Sassanid force near Bagavan. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, the Romans initially withdrew to avoid combat, but were eventually forced to respond to the attacks of the Persian cavalry and won a decisive victory in the subsequent battle, inflicting heavy casualties on the Persians. Faustus of Byzantium gives considerable credit for the victory to sparapet Mushegh Mamikonian. Faustus also tells of how Urnayr of Albania asked Shapuh to let his contingent face the Armenian force, and how Mushegh engaged in single combat with Urnayr and wounded the Albanian king, but allowed him to escape with his life. This may indicate that the battle took place in a similar fashion as other battles where the Romans and their allies faced the Persians and their allies, with the Romans facing the Persians and the allies fighting each other. According to Faustus, King Pap did not take part in the battle and observed from Mount Npat together with Patriach Nerses at the request of the Roman generals.

Aftermath

Ammianus writes that several other engagements were fought after the Armenian-Roman victory at Bagavan, with varying outcomes. Faustus tells of another great battle at Gandzak in Adurbadagan where the Armenians and Romans routed the Persians again, this time with Shapur there in person. After these battles, Shapur sent envoys and a truce was agreed upon. Shapur then returned to Ctesiphon and Valens to Antioch, with Armenia left effectively under Roman suzerainty. The truce would last for seven years. As a result of these victories, Mushegh is said to have reconquered many lost Armenian territories and forced the nobles who had revolted against the Arsacid monarchy to submit to Pap's authority.

LEGACY

Meruzhan is seen as a traitor in the classical Armenian histories. It is said that he was promised riches and governorship by Shapur and was given Shapur's sister as wife. James R. Russell believes Meruzhan to have been the dynastic ruler of Sophene who saw himself as a ruler exercising his lawful powers to counter the growth of Christianity. According to Moses of Chorene, Meruzhan was put to death by Smbat Bagratuni in Kogovit following the Battle of Bagavan in 371, where the Roman-Armenian army defeated the Persians. Faustus of Byzantium, however, reports that Meruzhan was killed several years later by Manuel Mamikonian's men after attacking Armenia with an Iranian army.